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Cotton, Elizabeth, Evans, Jason, Whitehead, Oliver, Briggs, Jonny, Loewenthal, Del, Fuller, Steve, Weintrobe, Sally, Eden, Angela and Morgan, David (2017) Thinkers in Residence: An EBook for Thinking. Cotton, Elizabeth and Whitehead, Oliver, eds. The Photographers' Gallery, <https://a-body-of-work-tpg.tumblr.com>. . [Book] (Published online first)

Published version (with publisher's formatting)

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THINKERS IN RESIDENCE

an ebook for thinking

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Biographies

Elizabeth Cotton is a writer and educator working in the field of mental health at work. She teaches and writes academically about employment relations and precarious work, business and management, adult education, solidarity and team working, and resilience at work. Elizabeth worked as an organiser and educator for the Miners' International and has worked with activists from 35 developing and transition economies. She has worked as a psychotherapist in the NHS and is currently writing her next book *Surviving Work: How to manage working in healthcare*, Gower 2016. She blogs as www.survivingwork.org and @survivingwk and runs the Surviving Work Library, a free resource for working people on how to do it.

Oliver Whitehead is Projects Curator at The Photographers' Gallery, London.

Jonny Briggs Jonny studied at Chelsea College of Art (BA, 2008) and Royal College of Art (MA 2011) in London. Awards include Saatchi Gallery UK/raine Finalist, a 2014 Paul Huf nomination (Brett Rogers), Foam Talent 2014, the 2011 Conran Award for Fine Art, a Lumi Honorary Art Award (2011), Saatchi New Sensations 2011 Winner, The Catlin Prize finalist 2012, and a NESTA Creative Sparks Award. Solo exhibitions include Photoforum Pasquart Photography Museum in Switzerland 2017, N Contemporary, hosted at MC2 Gallery in Milan 2015, Marie-Laure Fleisch in Rome 2015, Julie Meneret in New York City 2014, Simon Oldfield Gallery in London 2013, FaMa Gallery in Verona 2012, and White Project in Paris 2012. Work has been published in the British Journal of Photography, The Guardian, The Times, The Independent, Arte, Aesthetica Magazine, Elephant Magazine, La Stampa and national newspapers of France, South Korea and The Netherlands, and documentaries of the work have been shown on Channel 4, Sky TV and French and German cable TV. Jonny continues to live and work in London.

Angela Eden works as an organisation consultant using psychoanalytic ideas to inform her work with individuals, teams and organisations. She uses a relational model of work in a wide variety of sectors including health and social care. Her original training as an English and Drama teacher, led to community and economic development. She studied at LSE, the Tavistock Centre, and the Institute of Group Analysis and is a Board member of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO). She also uses writing and art as part of creative practice.


Marie Adams is a writer and practising psychotherapist. She is on the Professional Doctorate staff at the Metanoia Institute and a visiting lecturer on a number of International training programmes. Formerly a producer on the BBC's TODAY Programme, she has also acted as a consultant psychotherapist to the Corporation, giving workshops on trauma to news and documentary staff. Her current research interest focuses on the personal lives of therapists and the impact this has on their work. Marie's book, *The Myth of the Untroubled Therapist*, is now a standard text on counselling and psychotherapy training courses throughout the country. Her novel, *Telling Time*, is published by Karnac.

Jason Evans is a photographer.

Steve Fuller is Auguste Comte Professor of Social Epistemology in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. The author of twenty books, his most recent work focuses on the future of humanity. He has two new books being published this year: *Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History* (Acumen) and, with Veronika Lipinska, *The Proactionary Imperative: A Foundation for Transhumanism* (Palgrave).

Del Loewenthal is Professor of Psychotherapy and Counselling, and Director of the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, in the Department of Psychology at the University of Roehampton where he also convenes Doctoral programmes. He is also a Visiting Professor (Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Athens), and Adjunct Professor (faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand). He is an existential-analytic psychotherapist, chartered psychologist and photographer. He is on the faculty of the Philadelphia Association, and convenes the critical existential-analytic psychotherapy training programme of the Southern Association for Psychotherapy and Counselling (SAFPAC). He is co-founder of the Society for Critical Psychotherapy and founding editor of the European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling (Routledge). His publications include the forthcoming Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling after Postmodernism (Routledge) and Critical Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis and Counselling (Palgrave). Del also has a private practice in Wimbledon and Brighton.


David Morgan is a consultant psychotherapist and psychoanalyst NHS and private practice. Training analyst/therapist and supervisor for the British Psychoanalytic Association and British Psychotherapy Foundation, and a Fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He is Hon. Lecturer at City University, London. Director of (PiP) Public interest Psychology. He provides consultation to the public and private sector, including organisations of a political and social nature, and is a regular speaker at conferences. He was co-editor with Stan Ruszczynski of Lectures on Violence, Perversion, and Delinquency (Karnac, 2007).


Sally Weintrob  is a psychoanalyst in clinical practice who writes and talks on how to understand what underlies our widespread disavowal of climate change. She edited and contributed to Engaging with Climate Change:

Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives (2012), short listed for the International Gradiva Award for contributions to psychoanalysis. Her current work is on the culture of uncare, a culture that she argue works to sever our felt caring links with the environment and with each other (see <http://www.sallyweintrobe.com>). She is a Fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society (BPAS), a Chartered Clinical Psychologist (BPS) and a founding member of the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA).

Is That It?


Elizabeth Cotton

On the final day of our six-month project, right at the end of our final group recording a young woman who I had never met before grabs my arm and says "Is that it? (Angry eye popping pause) I want my money back" 

Rather than saying what first came into my mind (Get in line sister I feel that way about life) for the first time during our Thinkers in Residence project I was unable to find any words. Stunned by the spite, and poleaxed by the profundity of what she had just said. 

It's probably predictable that when you run a project that audaciously invites people into a public space to say what's on their mind an attempt will be made in last few minutes to hijack the love and generosity of the people involved. Sometimes this involves what can only be described as a psychic dump and run - when someone decides to try to, well, shit on it.

Free Association? How very dare you.

To be fair to this woman, she may have had a point. Generally when an institution asks you what you think, they don't actually mean it. There is something slippery about setting up a project in The Photographers' Gallery, made up of the designed stuff of Thinker in Residence badges, a Thought Creche, a beautiful website and good coffee. Asking people what they actually think in this warm-bath institutional setting could be precisely the opposite of an authentic question - a kind of psychic slip  of hand that people have become increasingly resentful of.

In the real world of 2016 if you're going to open up a psychic Thought Creche you have to be prepared to take some shit. Seriously.

To save us from our delusions and fantasies, during the Thinkers in Residence project Brexit happened. What followed was six months of conversations about racism, migration, politics and despair mixed in with stories of dads and jobs, a London now passed and the people we love. During the run up to the referendum the gallery had four bodies of work, finalists for the Deutsch Börse prize. All were explicitly political including works by Tobias Zielony on African refugees in Germany, Laura El-Tantawy on the Arab Spring in Egypt, Trevor Paglen on state surveillance and Erik Kessel's installation of a car representing a story about his relationship with his father. After Brexit the exhibitions changed to a Terence Donovan retrospective of his fashion and editorial work and a mixed show about black 'dandies' – Made You Look.

I'll be honest now. I had difficulties with most of this work. At the start I only loved one piece of work - a video of Freud and his best mate Emanuel Lowy talking without sound, the artist Pierre Bismuth tracing the unconscious movement of Freud's right hand. This piece was part of a beautiful exhibition of drawings and photographs, a quiet and reflective curation that really got my heart and mind going. How lovely to be reassured that the father of psychoanalysis wasn't a complete fraud and really did like to talk to his bezzie.

The rest of the artwork on show during the project I had to be talked into having a relationship with. Throughout the six months I developed a deep relationship with the space and its exhibitions - persuaded by what other people saw, rather than what I immediately could. What I learned through these interactions turned out to be a journey of 180 degrees. Let me explain. Despite spending most of my working life in the company of activists I can honestly say I have never had such politicised and transformative conversations as those I had in an art gallery with people I'd never met before. Literally the best conversation I've ever had about neo-liberalism was

held while looking at a Donovan picture of Cindy Crawford and talking about the emergence of supermodels. Actually true.

This might be the paradox of art spaces like The Photographers' Gallery - a white-walled institutional space both provocatively bland and containing at the same time. A safe and reliable space for my mind to wonder while at the same time an inadequate parental space, out of touch with the post-internet age. Unresponsive to the changing art landscape now the money has run out and the subsequent hostility we all hold towards our conservative and contracting institutions. I felt anger at the attempts to popularise the work, but at the same time a genuine affection for this space called art that allowed me to say whatever was on my mind. A child-like love and hate, I found myself slamming doors and spending much of my time sulking in the toilets.

There is also something about talking to random strangers that allows 'expertise' to be wrestled out of the hands of experts. This isn't to say there aren't people who know more about some things than others - but by being open to what anyone has to say, and to really give the time to hear them, you always learn something including how to change your view. And can feel differently about what you see. I have been changed by listening to Greek teenagers talking about images of refugees and stories of boys-done-good who grew up in the 50s in Soho. The activists who confirmed a growing realisation this summer that we don't have the leaders we deserve. The photographers and psychotherapists who continue to open themselves up to working through and finding meaning despite the dismal professional returns. The surprises and paradoxes that came out in these conversations happen when our environments don't reflect our realities - our minds start to work to fill in the gaps. Despite the populist pap we're getting force fed in our culture the fact remains that we're pretty smart and when representations of reality directly contradict our own experiences we get to work. It's at this point that things turn 180 degrees and ideas and meanings get turned on their heads.

Genuine transformational learning.

In a way it's both ambitious and silly to run a project aimed to promote human contact. The uncomfortable act of talking to someone else and genuinely being open to what they have to say remains a real struggle for all of us. Easier to retreat or withdraw than actually allow ourselves to be changed by other people. The actual difficulties we all experience in doing this means I'm not embarrassed that we asked people to wear 'Thinker' badges to identify themselves as people with thoughts open to other's thoughts. I think some badges should be worn with pride.

Despite the risk of being pretentious by actually talking out loud about psychoanalysis and photography, once we started to do it the act of exchange made a lot more sense. As with all of the things we create - they only ever come out of an intercourse with life and to do that we have to step outside of our self-contained spaces. As with sex, if you picture yourself doing it you go right off the idea. Better to just to get on with it.

What came out of Thinkers in Residence is not the perfect baby. It is a real Body of Work that could not have existed without each of us. In answer to the question "is that it?" Yes, it definitely is. We are all we've got.

To hear our final conversation go here  (add link to Oliver and Elizabeth's final conversation).

On Larry Dunstan

Jason Evans

Jason Evans *So I know Larry Dunstan from years ago, we met on a plane to Atlanta.*

Elizabeth Cotton *I love the way this is going.*

Jason Evans *Yeah? It gets better. We both had to photograph an American musician who became an actor later on... our approach to photography was completely different.*

Larry did a comedic set up with him, pretending he being thrown out of the offices of the record company by the security guards. It was Ludacris.

Juno Calypso *What it was actually Ludacris?*

Jason Evans *It was. And the people at the record company were being jerks, super overprotective, and we were only allowed to photograph Ludacris in their building, in a corporate office space. So Larry did this cool thing where he pushed back, and eventually got Ludacris to the doorway of the building, the threshold, so he wasn't actually in the office anymore which is what they wanted – I guess they imagined a headshot. Larry was shooting for The Face and I guess that wasn't their brief. Off the back of that I went renegade and suggested we just go to this place that I spotted earlier on. I'd got up early and been walking around looking for where Martin Luther King's buried. Visiting his grave was the best thing about that trip, apart from having a weekend away with Larry, who's a really nice guy. He works in the British Library now. He doesn't take pictures anymore but he collects photographs.*

And that's why I like these photographs because they're attached to this whole story about going to Atlanta, seeing Martin Luther King, meeting Ludacris and eventually driving across Atlanta with him singing gospel along to the radio.

Elizabeth Cotton *Oh my god! Because now I've become obsessed with who Larry Dunstan is. Now that changes things.*

Jason Evans *To me, knowing Larry and having that story makes me like these pictures even more, obviously. And that's the thing about photography, so reliant on context. And for me the context of this work is Larry.*

Elizabeth Cotton *That radically transforms...*

Jason Evans *I know, isn't it weird? I could have told you that Larry was an arsehole and that Ludacris was an arsehole and I hated Atlanta and I never got to meet Martin Luther King, but actually it was a wicked story and isn't that funny how that changes these pictures?*

Elizabeth Cotton *So in the archive is it a mixture of different photographs or is it about...*

Jason Evans *Well I'm going to go and see him and see what else he's got on the basis of these, but I don't know what he's collecting.*

Elizabeth Cotton *Do you know why he collected these particular pieces?*

Jason Evans *Presumably because they're really nice photos. You'd be well chuffed with these wouldn't you? The one at the end with the two lads with the two bottles on the chair – it's killer isn't it? I also think in terms of the way a lot of the work in this show is presented, I think they're quite mellow and that's nice. You don't get caught up in the presentation. You don't see the*

presentation, you just see the image. And if you're going to put this kind of photo on the wall you might as well not let presentation get in the way.

Elizabeth Cotton *Gosh this transforms things. I love these photographs, these are my faves.*

Jason Evans *You'd really like Larry as well.*

Elizabeth Cotton *Well OK that's a date. I also have a sense of fear when looking at these photographs, because of their date. And I just didn't know enough and I was like, 'what an audacious, proud, brilliant thing to get dressed up like that and have your photograph taken'. But because I didn't understand where these photographs came from I just felt scared for them. For the people in the pictures. And I got a little obsessed by whether there was a kind of dandy code or language in the way the bow ties were tied. There's this particularly jaunty one that has all gone to one side. and some of the others have got similar ties, and perhaps that could be a style language. It's not whatever the fashion item is, but the way you tie your tie. .. and then there's the guy with no shoes...*

Juno Calypso *If you're doing the whole outfit, surely for a man as well, the shoes... That's your thing? I'm wondering if they're thinking "I'm gonna be the guy with no shoes.*



An Overheard Conversation

A key motif for Thinkers in Residence was a silent film showing Freud and his childhood friend Emanuel Lowy just talking, unaware they are being filmed. The artist Pierre Bismuth has followed the movement of Freud's right hand during this conversation and here is a conversation between two Thinkers in Residence.

Thinker 1 *This is my fantasy... that he would come and talk to Freud about all his new objects he'd bought. Its not shoes and handbags but its kind of like that loving thing...like I have it with my sister..let me show you my new shoes, let me lay it all out so you can see something of my life.*

Thinker 2 *Yeah, show me your stuff..I love the fact that Freud is unconscious of being watched..Anna Freud said her father hated being photographed and always pulled a face.*

Thinker 1 *Could you love Freud any more at this point? He was self-conscious as well!*

Thinker 2 *Yeah, Anna Freud*

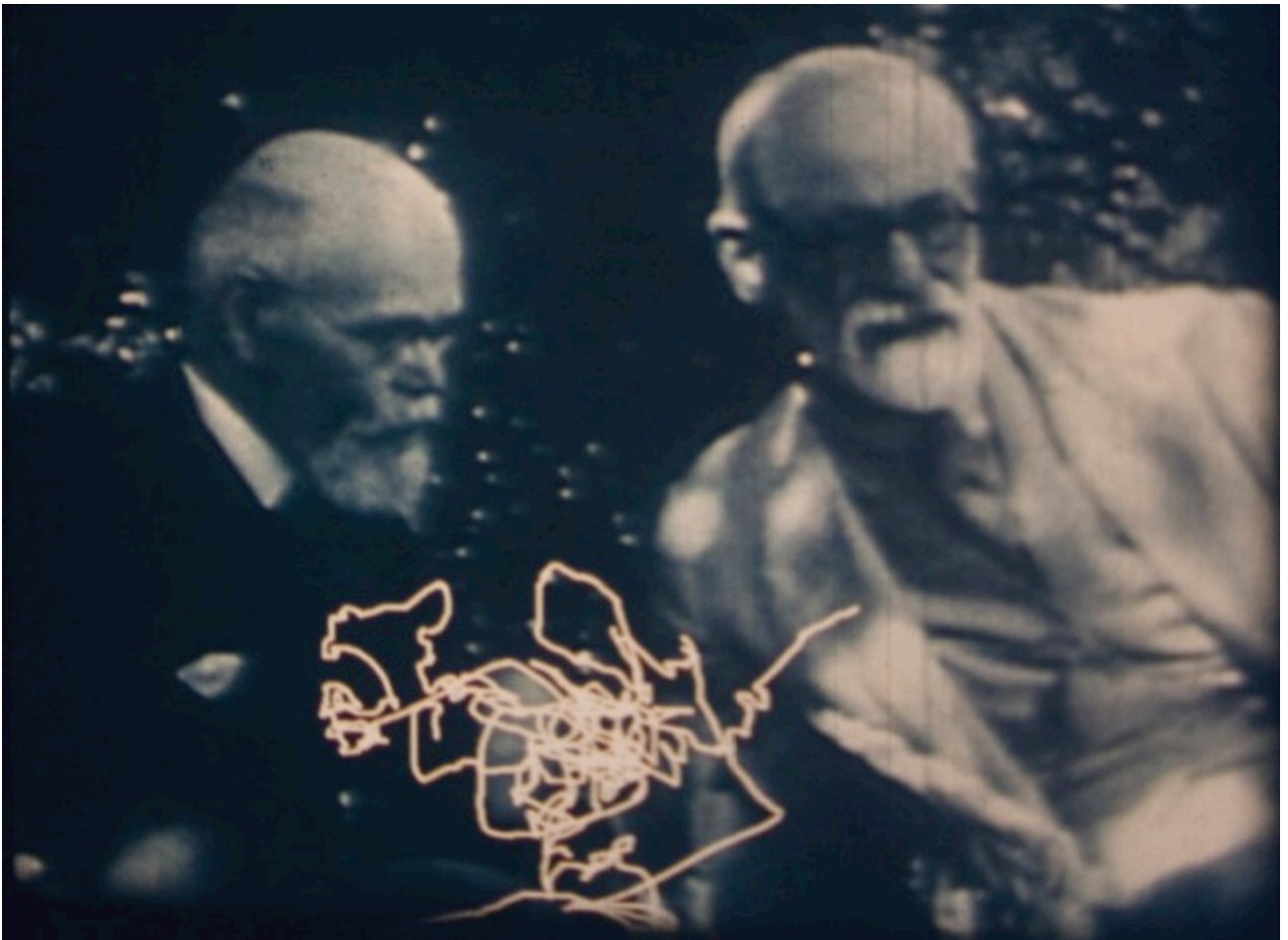
http://www.openculture.com/2012/05/sigmund_freud_home_movies_a_rare_glimpse_of_his_private_life.html loved this film because it was one of the few times that he was caught on film being natural. There's no sound of course, so we don't know what the subtext is...course by tracing his right hand there's a link to psychoanalysis trying to see the unconscious movement.

Thinker 1 *I can't get over how Freud is just talking non stop..I find that so reassuring on so many levels...the father of psychoanalysis is not a fake and*

he really does need to talk as much as all the other people who have benefitted from psychoanalysis.

Thinker 2 *they clearly know each other well enough to have roles. There are times when they are not saying anything...I love that, those pauses.....Of course the right hand is still moving.*

To hear this conversation go he  <https://soundcloud.com/the-photographers-gallery/elizabeth-cotton-and-clare-clare-grafik-discuss-pierre-bismuth>)



On Robert Palmer

Steve Fuller

Elizabeth Cotton *So we're in front of the Robert Palmer video which Donovan directed, is that right?*

Steve Fuller Yes he also directed Simply Irresistible too, he did that one, it looks just like this.

Elizabeth Cotton *What does this mean to you?*

Steve Fuller *Well it was one of the most iconic videos of the 1980s and I think in terms of the sorts of things I've been saying before about this kind of militaristic, very aggressive kind of stance. Which even though the lyrics are about being sexy it's actually very full on. Even the way in which people are looking straight at you and so forth continues that kind of line. So the background of it is very dark and menacing, there are all these grey clouds and everything in the back. Even though this is supposed to be a video about sexual enticement, it really seems very dangerous. It also seems in the spirit of Donovan's photography.*

Elizabeth Cotton *In what way?*

Steve Fuller Well I mean, though it gets a little softer here in the 80s, but in terms of it being very direct, aggressive... The black and white stuff really does it justice in terms of what it brings out. In a way he brings out the thuggish-ness in people, even if they're not particularly thuggish. A lot of

these people are actors, fashion models and things like this. The musical people are interesting. They look much tougher than they actually are... Or were... and I think he captures that really well.

Elizabeth Cotton *There's something really odd about the Robert Palmer video in that the women come across as more aggressive.*

Steve Fuller *He looks sort of startled.*

Elizabeth Cotton *Let's be honest, he's shorter.*

Steve Fuller *That seems kind of deliberate, he could have had short women – there are plenty of them around. His whole expression and in fact the way he moves in the video, it's like he's being pushed back.*

Elizabeth Cotton *You say there are lots of short women, but there aren't lots of short models. Models are very tall.*

Steve Fuller *They wanted to flatter him. You think about the history of short actors... Tom Cruise, you name them.*

Elizabeth Cotton *You don't want to know my thoughts on short men. I like them.*

Steve Fuller *The point is that you can get appropriate sized women.*



Psychic Map

Jonny Briggs




The Thought Creche

Elizabeth Cotton

In the metric age, having half-baked ideas has become a revolutionary act.

As someone who doesn't remember whole facts - just some bits, bobs and loose associations - I've never been much convinced by our societal obsession with metrics. When it comes to living a meaningful life, you had me at "I'm not sure this is an actual fact but..."

In the Age of the Quantified Self  <http://www.economist.com/node/21548493/>) we are constantly being measured and measure each other. From calories to depressed thoughts, an algorithmic withdrawal from reality where development is just colour by numbers. To the extent that the quantified self is profoundly preferred over the actual self.

This preoccupation with performance has an inevitable effect on how we talk to each other. If we talk at all. It's not exactly radical to suggest that the our culture of exchange has been profoundly shaped by technology and economics. A growing sense that without posting our experience on social media, what actually happens in our lives has no meaning. A culture where nobody talks to anybody in public spaces, and ideas are developed by the individual in a psychic incubator. Art by immaculate conception.

This delusional sense of self-sufficiency is, I'm going to suggest, the lived experience of neo-liberalism. I'm not technically saying that capitalism is to blame - I think the drive to avoid human contact and deny dependency is

inbuilt - but the attempt to fit ourselves into boxes, outputs and numbers is happening in a context of a particular economic model.

The trouble is that for many of us, particularly anyone who has any experience of mental distress, this leaves us without access to help and battling it out with an internal Thatcherite regime. Deregulation becomes widespread, care becomes privatised and I am locked in an isolating self-sufficiency. Under this internal economy there is no such thing as psychic society.

This version of human experience is directly opposed to everything I've ever learned about anything at all. Ever.

What I know about human development can pretty much be condensed into two simple facts.

Actual Fact 1: If you ask people what their reality is and listen to the answer you will definitely learn something. Do it enough and you're facing the prospect of a profoundly loving and political act - to become the change you want to see in the world rather than just banging on about it.

Actual Fact 2: This exchange between people is best done in a containing safe space where you don't get asked to leave for talking shit and not being productive. A thought crèche if you like, where our half baked buns can be developed safely in an oven. Creating something takes time and the absence of a categorical pressure to hurry up and get your shit together.

Not wishing to come over all pan-sexual on you but having thoughts does all come down to sex. In psychoanalytic thinking there's an idea of the 'creative couple' - an exchange between two different entities bringing something new to life. Far from the narcissistic self-sufficient stuff of multiple choices, this is a

belief that any ideas come from an intercourse with life. Whether its others' ideas, a photograph or another person, everything we learn comes from some kind of contact with the real world.

Free Association? How very dare you.

The work of Laura El-Tantawy and Tobias Zielony made me think of the power, fear and excitement that is wrapped up in the dynamic of change.

Laura's work evoked the feelings I had when standing in Tahrir square + I thought about how photography can take me back to a previous state of being. And also about what life is like for the residents of Cairo - it's not over yet!

A Body of Work: Thinkers in Residence

WHAT'S
ON YOUR
MIND

THOUGHT
CRÈCHE

how much
photography can
do to bridge difference

and encourage interrogation
^{both} of the political and
deeply personal

What's on your mind when you're thinking about the exhibitions, the space and the people in it?

sometimes
simultaneously

THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALJERY *SurvivingWork*

An Overheard Conversation 2

Some Thinkers in Residence had some actual thoughts about a body of work Unfinished Father by the Dutch artist Erik Kessels - the piece is made up of series of images and bits of a car that Erik's dad was renovating when he had a stroke which left him unable to speak and communicate. ~~Click HERE <http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2016-2> to see images of this work.~~

This is an overheard conversation.

Thinker 1 *This is the work that I remembered from a few weeks ago, there's something here where he's trying to connect with his father...it generated a conversation with you and others about our own fathers. This is my fantasy of course...*

Thinker 2 *I'm interested in your fantasies...*

Thinker 1 *...that in putting this piece together he found out something about his father... that he couldn't have achieved otherwise...that's what happens in therapy through a different perception of our histories we somehow come to terms with something of ourselves. This is a very moving piece for me, and who would of thought it, it's a car!*

Thinker 2 *We've been talking a lot today about working through, as we're working through it.*

Thinker 3 *You know how you have to sometimes organise your own boxes in your own mind, I feel that's what the photographer is doing. As beautiful as*


this work is I imagine that what its done for the artist and his father is an incredibly more powerful experience.

Thinker 1 *...Its when we fragment we're in trouble. there's bits of rust, there's wheels..all the bits of a car you can imagine in here. Photography is not flat - I think that's what you're saying too. That they are not just flat photographs on the wall, they're alive.*

Thinker 2 *I just didn't really want to look at these photographs in the boxes, they just seem a bit unfinished, fragmented, and I didn't really want to make the connections... I talked to this guy about those photographs of a steering wheel. He really loved them because they're showing the repair of and the completion of something*

Thinker 3 *I think the steering wheel is probably one of my favourite parts of this room*


Thinker 2 *Really, now we're getting geeky*

To listen to this conversation between Marie Adams, Oliver Whitehead and Elizabeth Cotton and our growing Body of Work Archive click HERE 

<https://a-body-of-work-tpg.tumblr.com>

Reflections on Trevor Paglen's Photographs

Sally Weintrobe

I'm with Elizabeth Cotton at The Photographer's Gallery looking at the photographs that won Trevor Paglen the prestigious Deutsche Börse photography prize in 2016. Elizabeth has invited my reflections. 

Paglen's photos are large and painterly. One is a stunning impressionistic picture of a Nevada sky at sunset reminiscent of Turner. In it is a tiny mark, a smudge so small that it looks like a minute insect or speck of dust. In fact it's a drone. We only see the drone by looking very closely indeed. The end use of drones is killing people.

Paglen has said of this work, and his work in general: *"The idea is to try to create images that help us see the historical moment that we live in. ... I mean that literally, not as a metaphor. ... What I do is take an image that would be very familiar to somebody and suggest that it's actually deeply unfamiliar. ... We don't think about the sky as being a landscape of war necessarily, in the traditional understanding of that image. ... You have to go out of your way to see (that)".*

Paglen's genius is in the way in which he engages our feelings of shock about the violence of drones. He does this not by taking a photograph that shows the violence, but by showing the drone as so tiny one does not notice it. We only see the violence when we shake ourselves out of familiar ways of seeing and familiar expectations and are willing to go out of our way to do this.

He insists his work is literal but I suggest it works as metaphor too, helping us understand what's involved with the psychological mechanism of disavowal. Disavowal involves finding ways to 'rid ourselves' of those disturbing feelings that threaten to loom large when we face unpleasant or morally threatening realities. A common way disavowal works is to make what would disturb us

seem to be tiny, insignificant or far away. Disavowal is magical thinking. One cannot get rid of reality by 'resizing' it; one cannot turn a large threat into a tiny one by 'relocating' it imaginatively so far away in our inner mental landscapes that it no longer has the power to touch us at a feeling level. In a state of disavowal we believe we have 'dealt with' a problem when all we have actually done is to make it seem insignificant. And, because we falsely believe we have now 'dealt with' the problem, the problem left unaddressed only grows.

A highly disturbing current reality is that our carbon intensive lifestyle is killing people. It has led to climate instability (increased hurricanes, floods and droughts) and it is already affecting food supplies. Unless we quickly move away from fossil fuels to renewable forms of energy, people and animals will die in vast numbers.

Our historical moment is that most of us are in deep disavowal about the violence and suffering our current carbon intensive way of living entails.

My current workⁱⁱ is on the way culture - through mass media, advertising, political framing and group culture - heavily promotes this disavowal. It relentlessly promotes the benefits fossil fuels bring and it relentlessly tells us we are exaggeratedly entitled to these benefits because we are special. It airbrushes out the violence and suffering they also bring. Seeing the violence would be deeply uncomfortable for most people and that would not be good for business as usual.

I suggest our culture encourages us to see a photo like this one (not by Paglen) as a plane in a beautiful sky at sunset jetting us away on holiday. Our culture works tirelessly to maintain this as the familiar view. We need to go out of our way, as Paglen put it, to see dead bodies as part of this picture. The UK Government has just decided to build a third runway at Heathrow Airport. This will mean many vulnerable Londoners (children, the elderly and the infirm) will be killed each year by increased air pollution¹. The government is currently downplaying this stark reality. That tells us it does not care if

Londoners live or die. They don't see the consequences for real people in their idealized view of carbon based economic expansion. The pain of stepping out of disavowal and confronting this includes feel abandoned and uncared for. It also includes the anxiety of knowing leaders currently in power are in such a state of disavowal themselves they do not care if *they* and their families live or die (they live in London too).

To resist the siren-like cultural pull to disavowal is to shake ourselves out of emotionally comfortable but fake views; to allow ourselves to see the true scale of violence and suffering that lies behind an economy based on fossil fuels. Also, to see the true scale of uncared in a mindset that puts profit and unsustainable expansion ahead of life itself; that does not own this position as it has airbrushed the bodies out of the picture.

Climate change brings a growing number of refugees seeking food and shelter and fleeing wars exacerbated by conflict over resourcesⁱⁱⁱ. Tobias Zielony's photographs of refugees in Europe were also on show at The Photographer's Gallery^{iv}. I said to Elizabeth Cotton many people look horrified if one says the war in Syria was in part caused by drought brought about by climate change. They reject this outright whereas it is now a well-researched conclusion^v. Elizabeth in reply made the profound point that when we admit climate change leads to refugees the refugee story is no longer a story we tell about other people. It is a story that involves us all. To admit that brings emotional discomfort of a high order.

Elizabeth and I discussed 'Noah's Arcism', the idea now gaining traction that 'we', the special entitled ones, will be able to protect ourselves as resources get scarcer by keeping others, including refugees, out. 'Noah's Arcism' tends to go with demonizing the 'pushed out' ones as no good, feckless, wanting to invade us and so on. Noah's Arcism also involves pushing out and abandoning the part of ourselves that cares and knows we need to lessen our expectations and live within the limits of planet earth. Leaving fossil fuels in the ground is a vital part of addressing the refugee problem.

We are incredulous when Donald Trump says, “I will build a wall”. We know it is an illusory way to keep out what disturbs people. But we build inner imaginary walls to keep out our pain at knowing our ‘carefree’ consumer lifestyles entail violence and suffering. We use inner surveillance to spot any felt pain so we can quickly insulate ourselves from it with fresh applications of disavowal.

Another of Paglen’s photographs provides a metaphor for the inner surveillance that goes on mostly beneath our conscious awareness to support the disavowal.

Hidden from this familiar view of an idealized idyllic summer holiday at the beach is an American NSA (National Security Agency) spy station monitoring the messages carried along the fibre optic cables that carry the world’s messages to and fro. The cables are under this beautiful stretch of coast. Disavowal works by constantly surveying our inner feelings of disturbance about all the violence and suffering our historical moment entails. This monitoring of our disturbance is not to help us face the disturbance but to help us find corrupting psychological ways to fend it off.



The Beginning of a Marketing Strategy for Britain

Jason Evans

“It’s the beginnings of a visual marketing strategy for Britain, isn’t it? What we’re looking at?”

“He was part of a group of photographers referred to as the Young Meteors. Looking through their output was a revealing insight for someone who is coming at politics from the Left and who is not buying into our current consumerist agenda... It helps to understand who your enemies are and how they construct their propaganda and stuff. And a show like this has the potential to be a useful way of learning about that as opposed to being a ‘let’s get some bums on the seats and put on a fashion show because fashion’s cool and people go to museums that have got fashion in’. It’s part of a dumbing down of culture and it’s not a particularly smart show from what I can tell. I’m glad to see some actual magazine covers on the wall for a change. I mean essentially he was making images that were designed to be on pages, not on walls and so it’s nice to see the original things with the typography and the crops and the lithographic reproduction. That to me is useful, at least more innovative than just printing up his negatives and making them look like what is currently accepted as a photography show.”



Four Historical Gazes

Steve Fuller

The photograph that struck me most at the recent exhibition of Donovan's work was a piece that appeared in an early 1961 edition of the new men's magazine *Man About Town* called 'Thermodynamic'. The black-and-white photo features a somewhat dwarfed sharp-suited gent in the 'Mad Men' style looking right-upward at a 45 degree angle. He is standing on one of the elevated platforms of the Grove Road Power Station in South London. The gent seems to be looking at the top of a tall ladder and steam pipe nearby, while a bell curve-shaped plume of smoke forms just behind him.

Given the title of the photo, its mathematical-physical implications struck me, especially given the time of its composition. Although the subject is casually posed (hand in pocket), his right-upward gaze matches that of much 20th century Modernist imagery aimed at portraying people fixated on the future. And indeed, the items on which his gaze is fixated (the ladder and steam pipe) make the trek to the top more efficiently than he could from his current position. Moreover, the 1960s was the period when people were discussing various 'growth curves' – linear, exponential and logistic – to capture long term tendencies in everything from population to production.

At the same time, the subject appears to be engulfed in a fog of entropy, whereby the steam rises, peaks and then dissipates. Presumably, the photo's title relates specifically to this phenomenon, which cuts against the sleek Modernist narrative suggested by the subject's gaze.

This immediately reminded me of Caspar David Friedrich's famous 1818 painting, 'Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog', which has graced the covers of

several books in recent years, including Paul Johnson's *The Birth of the Modern* (1991) and John Lewis Gaddis' *The Landscape of History* (2004). This painting also features a sharp-suited male figure engulfed in fog, now looking into the distance from atop a precipice, where he can make out various landmarks, albeit vaguely. Although he is a larger and more centrally placed figure, the man is conceptually dwarfed in the painting by the vast uncertainty of the landscape that surrounds him. This perception is enhanced by the artist capturing him from behind, so his distinctiveness as a person is never crystallized.

Nevertheless, the man does seem to be looking either straight ahead or down at his surroundings, which suggests an air of defiance or mastery. Here we see an interesting difference in the 19th century Romantic and 20th century

Modernist iconography of depicting a sense of control: Friedrich's figure doesn't look up.

In both the photo and the painting, the viewer is left with a sense of ambivalence about how to regard the subject's assertive stance. Indeed, the viewer is specifically positioned to become ambivalent. After all, it is not clear that the man in Donovan's photo can actually see the plume of smoke enveloping him, if he is so fixated on what lies above him. Similarly, the man in Friedrich's painting is probably so engrossed in what lies before him that he fails to recognize how small he looks in comparison to it.

And there are two further historical gazes which are suggested here. One comes from the ninth of Frankfurt School critic Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), where he makes reference to Paul Klée's painting 'Angelus Novus' to explain progress as a destructive force in history. According to Benjamin, Klée presents the angel as staring at the viewer on the verge of flying backwards away from what appears to be accumulating

debris at the angel's feet. He reads this as a depiction of how the future supersedes the present. From the angel's eternal standpoint, the viewer is just carnage in the waiting, an attitude suited the mood at the onset of the Second World War. But the angel may also be casting a more brutal version of the gaze that is subtly foisted on the viewer in the Donovan and Friedrich pictures.

Finally, perhaps the Ur-image of these historical gazes appears in Exodus 33: 19-23, in which Moses begs to see God and God replies by showing Moses the Promised Land by standing behind him and then allowing Moses to see only God's back when Moses turns around. The philosopher of science turned scholar of Judaism, Menachem Fisch, provides an interesting interpretation of this episode in the conclusion of *Rational Rabbis* (1997). Fisch argues that God proceeds in this manner because while it may satisfy Moses' curiosity, in fact Moses knows much less than he thinks because as a finite being he sees the Promised Land *only* at a distance, namely, from the rock where God asks him to sit to see it unfold. Klée's angel solves this problem of perspective by its perpetually instantaneous backward motion, whereby it always retreats from what it sees before it is destroyed.

In contrast, both Donovan and Friedrich keep the viewer in a state of suspended animation between complete knowledge and complicit ignorance.





An Overheard Conversation 3

This conversation took place looking at the work of Tobias Zielony. ~~Click HERE <http://www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk/deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2016-2> to see the images.~~

Thinker 1 *What I was thinking about a lot was the feeling of displacement - the sort of this sense of being in the wrong place at the wrong time... there's a lot of thoughts about being uncomfortable in the place you find yourself to be... A sense that as a person you're in a particular place at a particular time and actually the path that history took is not the one you backed. You're actually belonging to another world, another place, a different path... The point at which you are most yourself and the place where your life was most real is not the place you have not ended up.*

Thinker 2 *Oh my god, listen to you! That's so profound, isn't it?*


Thinker 1 *Yeah, well I'm full of cold medication.*

Thinker 3 *Oh, that's what you call it!*

Thinker 2 *My view of this body of work about migrants has changed profoundly. It's the only piece of work that left me really cold. There was all this moralising going on in my head....I found it hard to relate to the images and then this Greek bloke pointed out to me that the layout of the pictures is just a newspaper but just the story hasn't been told....you're so used to being manipulated and pushed into a moral position about how do I relate to these people and so this space did unnerve me actually...*

Thinker 1 *It depends on the extent to which you feel yourself to be an outsider...that sense of things not conforming around you.*


Thinker 3 *We were talking about the discomfort of nations...when people do the right thing like Germany and Sweden with the refugee population and having to live with that not being comfortable because its suddenly bringing to the fore all the things in the society that you want to keep down. Its like being in therapy, all this crap comes to the surface and you think, I didn't really want to feel this, could somebody just turn it off.*

Click HERE to listen to the full conversation  <https://soundcloud.com/the-photographers-gallery/anonymous-voice-recording-02>.



Sex, Intimacy, Photography and Psychoanalysis

Del Loewenthal

Terence Donovan might appear to have had much going for him, this London East-End-er seen as spearheading "a working class movement characterised by self-motivation, self-belief, ambition and originality". 

He seems to have been, at least in the 1960's, very much where it was at.

The curator of Donovan's retrospective exhibition also quotes fellow photographer Brian Duffy "Before us fashion photographers were tall, thin and camp. We're different. We're short, fat and heterosexual". It was Donovan and Duffy together with David Bailey, whom Cecil Beaton coined the term "the terrible three". Interestingly, Beaton also said of Donovan "He is bitten with a driving ambition that does not allow him to rest".

Donovan was a superbly able photographer and printer. He managed to capture an immediate sexuality in his portraits of Terrance Stamp, Julie Christie, Cindy Crawford etc. and indeed most of his work. But then how come he killed himself?

One signal may be found in the experience that his photographs lack intimacy. In my own and others photographic work I am particularly interested in the relationship between the photographer and photographed at the moment of the shutter. There is the question, following the French philosopher Levinas's notion of ethics as putting the other first, as the extent to which the photographer and the photographed puts his/ her self or the other first.

Though there is an argument that such notions of ethical practice are not appropriate for the artist photographer: as Richard Avedon commented "what right do Cezanne's apples have for telling Cezanne how to paint them". In Donovan's work, both photographer and photographed seem to have a

mutual goal of putting the other first in order that both can become stars - in this context this might be seen regardless of gender. Yet there is no depth. This was even more striking when visiting the exhibition for the second time when it initially didn't seem relevant to my post Brexit anxieties. Furthermore, this lack of intimacy appears even more apparent in his later work of mannequins as sex machines. Indeed, his last work "swinging London's second incarnation" shows through his photographs of British rock-n-roll musicians again the mutual attempt to promote stardom and the absence of anything else - no second incarnation.

Interestingly whilst we are given Donovan's quote "if you're not embarrassed by it you can enjoy it" and his work reflected and encouraged a sexuality and significantly a more open enjoyment of this, we are also told that after his suicide at the age of 60 "his negatives were found in sealed boxes - he did not relish looking back". We can of course only speculate as to whether if he could have been enabled to look back at 'the negatives' in his life, whilst we might not have had such photographic work fuelled by "a driving ambition that does not allow him to rest", he might have had more of an option to be alive today.

We are told that Donovan committed suicide after suffering from depression. In this last interview shortly before his death in 1996 (Martyn Moore "Goodbye guv'nor") he said, "I am interested in illustrating the upbeat things of life, I'm not riveted by the down-beat. I know a lot about the downbeat but it doesn't intrigue to record it. I like the glisten. I know it's irrelevant but it's hopeful, quite harmless, and quite cheerful.... There has never been a situation in my life that got remotely close to cracking me." So was Donovan's way of life, often seen to his annoyance as a chirpy cockney driving a Rolls, more a form of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy that up to a point took his mind off things whilst making him and others into stars.

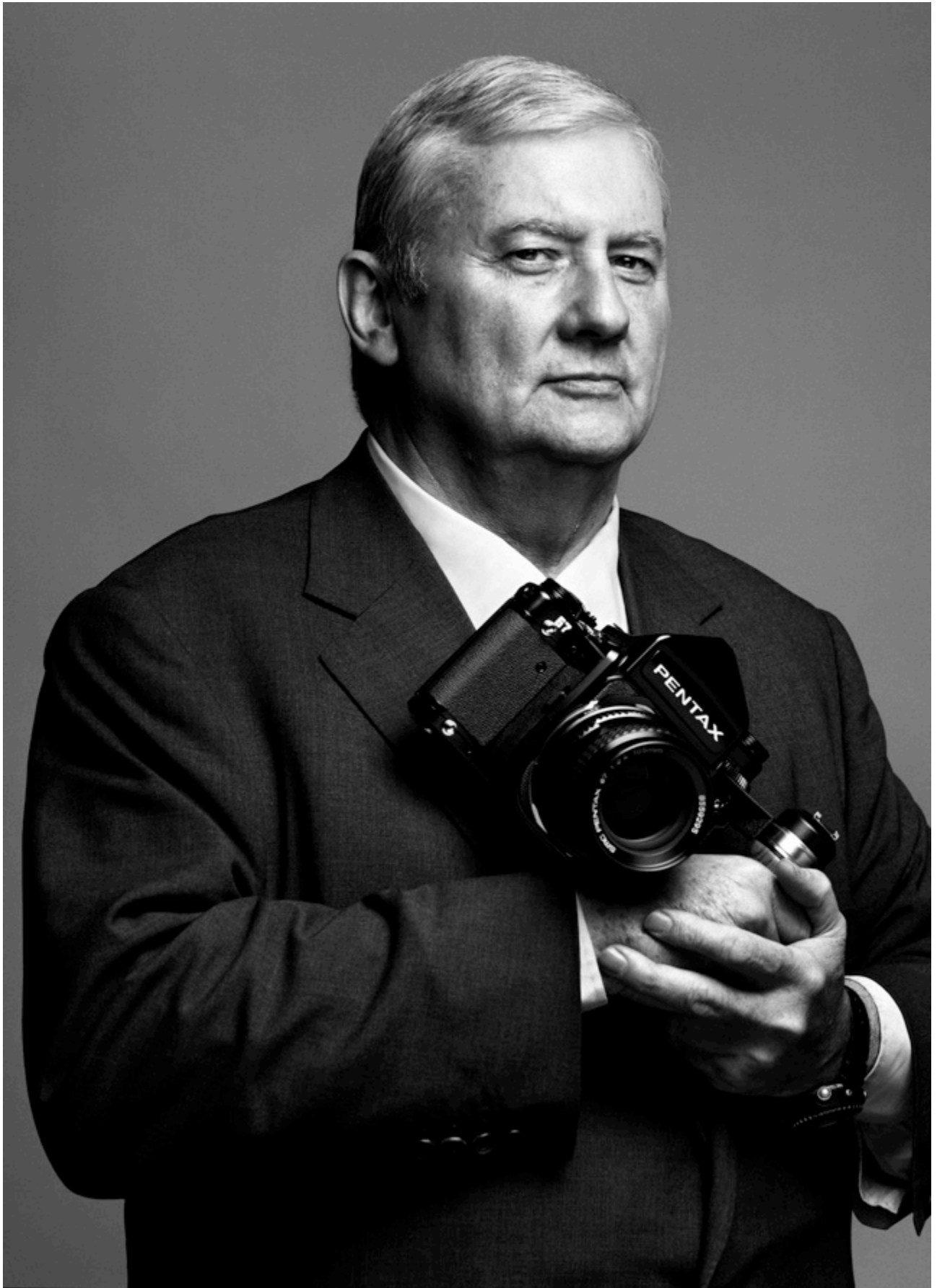
And what of psychoanalysis? Whilst it might have enabled Donovan to allow his thoughts to come to him, does it like Donovan's photography encourage too much individualism over the common good? Should psychotherapists and photographers be more concerned about their responsibility for the responsibility of their subjects to others? Does this all come out in the analytic wash or is something else very much needed?

The more so in a post Brexit neo-liberal world where fewer and fewer people own more of it and the stranger is not welcome. Should not only photographers but also psychoanalysts have to change their ways so that we don't attempt to make photographer and photographed / psychoanalyst and patient into subjects, the main actors of our own dramas? Instead could we explore more intimacy and responsibility beyond the consulting room where more and more people are being given only walk on parts.

To give a small example whilst protecting confidentiality, I also work as an existential-analytic psychotherapist and someone I saw was worried about the fallout from her neighbours as through purchasing 'expert' advice my client had obtained planning permission for an extension whilst giving her neighbours the minimum notice. My client kept saying 'I only did it for us!' implying her and her partner. I replied 'who is us?' Much evolved from this.

As psychotherapists do we give those we see further advantage - a social capital that allows our clients/ patients to breathe somewhat more easily, but not others. Are we like Terence Donovan making our clients and patients and ourselves into a type of star, even assisting with more possibilities of intimacy together with being able to enjoy ordinary unhappiness, yet what of how we and our clients treat others?

Those interested in implications of psychoanalysis may not be peddling approaches that take our clients minds off their problems but in general we may encourage too much of a narcissistic ego-centrism that unthinkingly further divides the haves from the have-nots and leads to a rich poverty through taking advantage of others.



Made Me Look

Angela Eden

I visited the *Made You Look* exhibition four times, and continued to find interest, and aroused curiosity. It was initially a shock to see such direct images of black men in their own context. Made me look, oh yes, and I heard a new voice that said 'look at me.'

During the period of the Thinkers in Residence project I discovered a range of exhibitions in London that made me look at black representation in photographs. I experienced a surprising feeling that I was seeing between the cracks of representation as the city was full of images that made me look.

I stumbled across an exhibition in Rivington Place of photos by Raphael Albert - an exhibition about black beauty pageants. Raphael organised and documented black beauty pageants in London from the 1960s right up until the early 1990s. The show aimed to 'educate the public in photography by addressing issues of cultural identity and human rights' - curated by Autograph ABP who contributed to the Black Portraits exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery exhibited in three small rooms in the corridors and edges of the main galleries. So small, so apologetic, sidelined.

Another visit to the Camden Arts Centre, Making and Un-Making showed a range of images and sculptures that redefined black culture. Young girls dressed in those large red and blue plastic bags, sleeping in them, living with them. Stunning, shocking and scored into my visual memory.

I grew up in the 1950s in London and saw the early West Indian community settling in, working, building communities and families. Looking back the representation was limited, as either 'the stranger ' or 'the worker'. When did I not notice the negative images? When did the media distort the facts? Why am I surprised that the four exhibitions I 'found' had so little publicity?

Made **you** look, made **me** look, and surprised me that these exhibitions were not widely known as important contributions to the mainstream of important exhibitions in London.

All of these thoughts related to the experience of walking from the second to the fifth floor in the Photographers' Gallery to the Terence Donovan exhibition. So white, so "look at me I am important, beautiful, worthy of your gaze".

After my first visit to the Donovan show I found it irritating. A glossy edited version of my history. Something sexist and selective in the photos that made me not want to look. Technically beautiful photos, but full of vanity. I found less to engage me, and yearned for reality.

The 'Thinkers in Residence' project was an inspirational way of looking. My favourite memory of the show was of us, the thinkers, hanging out and thinking together. Ordinary reality.



On Erik Kessels' 'Unfinished Father'

David Morgan

“If everybody I saw was like Erik Kessels, I’d be out of business because he has a capacity to symbolise and to put things into form where other people struggle to find meaning.

No journey is unfinished. And Erik, as you can see with your sister, and your father, painful experiences stay with us forever and we’re constantly working through them to try and find meaning so there’s never a finished journey, ever.

It reminds us all of our unfinished journeys with aspects of others or ourselves that are frozen in time. People we’ve lost, people we’ve loved who are no more, alive or dead or somewhere in between, no journey with the other is ever unfinished.

I wandered around Erik’s installation and I thought about my own father who is 90, he’s still going strong and recently we were supposed to celebrate his 90th birthday party on 7th May. Shortly before, he decided he doesn’t want to have his 90th birthday party because he doesn’t want everybody to know how old he is. At 90 years of age, he is still rather narcissistically worried about his age.

Facing loss is very difficult, but I think with your work, Erik, you have found a way of processing and dealing with painful experiences and you have a way of communicating that talks to us all. Again, every relationship we have is always an unfinished journey.

All loss remains inside of us, I was thinking about you working through the way your father is at the moment and probably thinking about what's going to happen in the future. And how one relates to somebody one is losing or who is lost... We change towards it.

This work represents a particular response to where your relationship with your dad is at the moment, frozen in time. There is something absolutely beautiful about it. By showing your father the photographs, at some sort of level you're working through some state of loss even though he is stuck, and frozen physically.

Erik offers images to his father, who is then able to process them and understand what his son is doing... Using something his father clearly loved, the cars, and you, and your sister.

This work is communicating something to us on a very deep symbolic level about Erik and his father's deep involvement in repairing things. I find Erik's communication to us today quite reparative, there is a way of symbolising something as awful as somebody having a stroke, or really awful and painful such as losing a sister.

There's a repairing of something so lost out of the past, which now carries on in your profound work. You both have a wish to repair a lost object. In psychoanalysis we call it a lost object. Freud wrote a brilliant paper called 'Mourning & Melancholia' which tells us that the only way to bear loss is to work through and uncover the love of the person you loved, but also to move on in your own life. And that's very painful."





An Overheard Conversation 4

This conversation took place looking at the work of Tobias Zielony. ~~Click HERE <http://www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk/deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2016-2> to see the images~~

Thinker 1 *There's something about having a woman as a model that lends itself to all kinds of interpretations...psychoanalysis tells us that nothing gets left behind...whether you travel physically...or psychologically... everything comes with you. Whatever this person has been through before they ended up in Hamburg...that's come with them.*

Thinker 2 *I look at this picture of a woman in a hat and I feel similar feelings...its the one picture where I feel some sense of strength. I've got an eye infection today - well, how profound is that, nothing's a coincidence is it...it means I'm a bit blurry eyed. That works pretty well with this picture of a dignified woman on a phone in a European street and she's wearing a hat... and when you've got an eye infection she looks almost aristocratic... but then when you look more clearly, the hat is tatty and the coat is second hand. So there's both these things, she's undeniably a very strong presence, dignified but in the details she's a refugee, so she's both of those things.*

Thinker 1 *... really all these people have is themselves now. They don't have a state, they don't have a passport, we don't know anything about them...these people are African refugees, and all they have is themselves and the authenticity that they are bringing, its really quite remarkable because the world is not kind to refugees... I think we could be a lot more compassionate about their circumstances.*

Thinker 2 *This Greek guy said to me there's something about the future in these photographs. History is unwritten in the case of refugees, you can turn*

*a blind eye to it and hope it's going to go away which of course its not.
There's a sense that this is now.*

Click HERE  <https://soundcloud.com/the-photographers-gallery/alison-bancroft-and-elizabeth-cotton> to listen to the full conversation.



An Observation

Elizabeth Cotton

One of the techniques used in psychoanalytic training is to learn how to observe. From infant observations, the much loved component to clinical training, to observing groups and the places we work, this is a simple but powerful way to cut to the unconscious chase.

To see what is really going on under the surface.

Through our Thinkers in Residence project I've developed a girl crush on The Photographers' Gallery - as a space and an institution. One of the many oddities of the building is the layout - a gangling teenager of a structure with five floors and no evident sense of coordination, despite the team of highly sophisticated curators and educators who frame our experiences.

My first observation involved standing in the lift for an hour. 

There's just one lift which is experienced as a dysfunctional kid refusing to get out of its bedroom. Everyone is always waiting for the lift to turn up. Tut, tutting and phone tapping as frustration turns to annoyance. Slowly the doors open with something of the "whaaaats your problem?" tone.

This location for an observation, on reflection, was a bit silly for someone who is supposed to blend into the background. But psychotherapeutic training prepares you well for awkward silences and tolerating other people's projections, just how hard can it be?

I start well, pleased to be in a confined space with no job, no busy-busy, an opportunity just to be. My psychic muscle memory of the experience of letting my mind wonder with no purpose kicks in. Like a bad meditation, I think about the last observation I did at a hospital in Bristol during the junior doctors'

strike. Already I feel the pressure to be some-where else with a purpose and a task.

I press the top floor button.

Floor 5: the doors open to a group of bright intense men hanging around a car. My reaction to this wall of masculinity wasn't very grown up and like a child I press every single floor down to B.

Floor 4: The doors open to a photograph of a black woman with red nails. In my hurry, a show about refugees becomes a bit bling bling. I feel uncomfortable with the association, relieved to be interrupted by a gaggle of teenage girls coming in. "What are you doing here?" they ask circling me - like a new girl I try to get them on my side and tell them I heard their laughing before the doors opened. "Oh NOOOOO", their delight at being welcomed to rebel, to have been noticed in a space called art.

Floor 3 is the education floor. Tourists sit reading leaflets and letting their walking boot feet rest. They look up tired and happy - like people digesting a good meal. I wonder if floor three is the stomach where art can be digested.

Floor 2 and the doors open to a charcoal drawing of a black sunrise sunset. The exhibition is of drawings and photos, a clever ensemble by my friend. I think of how cool and sophisticated the space is, tall and thin, like her. I've never seen a friend reflected in their work so clearly. A proud mum feeling spreads as the doors close.

As the hour progresses it dawns on me how hard its going to be not to talk to people. How to be a silent jobless person in a lift without freaking people out. Initially, people got awful busy on their phones. At one point the lift is full of young people plus me, all of them staring lovingly into their phones. I try not to go off on a well-rehearsed thought trail about narcissistic withdrawals and the end of intimacy. I wonder if today's the day when my middle age actually made me invisible. I angrily long for the day the lights get switched off. Ten seconds in a lift with people married to their phones and apparently I'm ready to get me a farm on higher ground and a gun.

Two middle-aged women get in the lift - they say hello to me and ask where the shop is. Ah, normalising. I smile but don't answer. A punitive psychoanalytic response - internally I sigh, why can't analysts just be nice? I think of my excuses to these women - that I really do understand how hard it is to be in the presence of someone who won't take your projections and yes, sometimes you just want people to play nicely.

An old teddy boy comes into the lift, the real deal. He tells me about his own photography - about how he's working on some abstract images and is inspired to do some pieces in reds and rusts. As we get to the ground floor I feel him observing me, lost in a lift. A generous lovely feeling fills the lift. He leaves me saying "I'm just here if you need some-one to talk to".

The doors close. My throat feels tight.

A couple come in bitching about a work colleague. The air in the lift feels like it's running out. All that anger sucking the life out of this shared space. They look unhappy, I avert my eyes not wishing to reflect anything back to them. I have a simple thought that they don't actually like each other - and as if they read my mind I feel their attention collectively turn towards me. Let the psychic ping pong begin. I feel my feet sink into the floor, as if they are spreading roots, and think about how irritated they must feel that I didn't flinch.

Buoyed by my capacity to withstand the feelings of others, I decide not to press any buttons and just let the lift wait. It goes to floor 4, and so we wait. I am left with my own thoughts.

Tick tock.

Anxiety starts rising, how very hard to wait. Remembering my training, I try to stay here, not to escape in my mind.

Within just a few minutes I feel incredibly alone.

I turn into the mirror I've been avoiding, catastrophically looking for a bit of human contact. I look tired, my hair is frizzy, a Thinker in Residence indeed. I snort that you don't have to be Freud to know that's possibly the hardest thing to do, to look yourself square in the face.

I press to the Ground floor. I step out onto the street and what feels like a tsunami of young women from the beauty school opposite come laughing down the stairs and into the cafe. They have no idea why they're so happy. But I do.

Photography & Psychoanalysis

Elizabeth Cotton & Oliver Whitehead

Oliver *I'd like to explore the relationship between photography and psychoanalysis by focusing on a number of contemporary artists who use the creative process to work through and make sense of aspects of their personal histories. To set the scene, let's begin with the work of Polish photographer Joanna Piotrowska. Her 2014 project Frowst - which means 'a warm, stuffy room' - is a series of black and white images that act as observational studies of the family unit. Fictional characters pose in twos and threes, and there's no obvious narrative.*

Elizabeth *This is a good place to begin because it's directly psychoanalytical - it's work that invites us to make associations based on the suggested relationships between the people, moving between the visible and invisible elements of the pictures. Piotrowska is visually exploring a psychoanalytic frame developed by the German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger called Constellation Therapy, in which the individual is understood systemically based in part on its relationship with others. Piotrowska is giving us a language of gestures that allow us behind the veneer of awkward family scenarios.*

Oliver *This body of work took time to have an effect on me because I needed to understand that language and the subtleties of it. The initial awkwardness of certain images - a forced brotherly kiss or a mother averting her eyes from a glaring father – seep in slowly, and it's a transformative process for the viewer.*

Elizabeth *This is an example of the process of working through issues in an attempt to understand them. As an artist or a patient, this involves making contact with memories and reconstructing psychic experiences to understand them.*

Oliver *That idea of construction is important when considering that photography can also be used to construct, reconstruct or even deconstruct memories. Artist Jonny Briggs makes work about childhood and family relationships, and his Schisms series is particularly relevant. This project sees Briggs experiment with ways to visualise the ‘shared mind’ he felt he had with sister growing up, and involves him physically cutting diagonally through old family photographs. The very act of cutting a photograph is as a deeply loaded act. Being able to shift the parts of the photograph around means that he can merge himself together with sister, and their heads often then appear to rest on each other’s shoulders.*

Elizabeth *It’s an unbearable fact of life that the things you love are the things that hurt. The process of splitting and projecting is a way to manage the experience of being in the world. It’s real ‘monsters under the bed’ material. Part of the power of these images is that they channel a deep human experience of attempting to manage anxiety and fear. Briggs’ interventions leave lost body parts suspended in each photograph, a head without a body and a body without a mind.*

Oliver *Peter Watkins also employs similar ideas of intervention and construction in The Unforgetting. The project follows Watkins’ poignant attempts to reconstruct and reconcile his memories of his mother, who tragically committed suicide when he was very young. The images feature nostalgic objects; a home movie, a set of German Roemer glasses that give a nod towards his heritage, and a frilly dress hanging in front of a window. All of Watkins’ images are black and white, but when framing the image of the*

dress, he places yellow glass over it. The colour yellow has happy connotations and so this is seemingly a way to give a wash of that warmth to the original, more remote image.

Elizabeth *In these images there's an attempt to recreate a mother's memory and confront difficult experiences of violent loss. There is a sense that the artist is repeatedly trying to understand something about his mother's state of mind and recreate memories of his own, rather than make do with the family photographs passed down to him.*

Oliver *I'm wondering then about this notion of re-enactment. There have long been discussions about photography's ability - or indeed inability - to represent 'the real'. Besides its truth claims, it is also a powerful tool of fiction or storytelling, and what we're seeing here is the theatre of photography. The space of the photograph becomes a place in which to perform and restage memories from one's own past. It's almost as if photography offers a safe space with which to 'rehearse' or 'test out', not just things that have happened, but also things that only might have happened - potential scenarios.*

Elizabeth *In psychoanalytic space, in order to explore complicated and difficult personal matters you have to be contained. In the same way, the space of the photograph, or being in spaces like galleries, offers us a framework for thinking about massive, chaotic, painful things because they contain us. Things can be thought about that can't always be done outside in the street, at work, or even at home. The process of repeatedly staging or taking photographs to work through something the artists seem to have lost contact with - a mother or a family schism - is a therapeutic act. They are working through by recreating meaning – a reconstruction of the psychic facts.*

Oliver *This is an interesting point to turn to the work of both Jason Evans and Ricardo Cases. Each of them use photography to work through personal things, but with very different approaches to the previous artists. Cases' project El porque de la Naranjas sees the artist's pursuit to reacquaint himself with the world after the death of his mother and a good friend. Moving to a small Spanish town to start anew, he made images that are full of colour and exude joy and hope. Meanwhile, Evans has been running The Daily Nice since 2004, an online platform upon which he posts a new photograph every day. It's an exercise that helps him to see the world in a more positive light.*

Elizabeth *I feel excited or compelled when I look at these images whereas with the works we discussed earlier, I feel them more in my mind. Often our reactions are more intellectual and cognitive than they are emotional or visceral, so in a sense, it's the same body and the same process, but the emphasis is different. I think of this as the difference between the mind's body and the body's mind.*

Oliver *I had no idea of the background to Cases' pictures at first, and on a purely aesthetic level they filled me with a sense of elation. I do feel, though, that there are clues within the images that signify an emotional state. Take, for instance, two consecutive images of the same scene of a wall in the photobook version of the project. The only difference when flicking between the two is that one is overexposed and one is underexposed, offering two opposing perspectives of the same thing. It's like visualising the experience of those days when you walk out of your house and everything looks darker than it did the day before.*

Elizabeth *It's like the sensation of moving from a feeling of being thin-skinned to thick-skinned. There is also an addictive quality to Cases' pictures and this is something aligned with the experience of depression, where a person will become reliant upon a particular narrative or pattern of life.*

Something is projected into the viewer with these images – they are small-scale enactments of bi-polar experiences, creating a frustration and an appetite for more.

Oliver *That addictive quality can be attributed to parts of Evans' practice too. There's no archive: a picture is there and then it's gone. He has previously said that the presence of his camera reminds him to look for good things and so the images on this site can be understood as things that have given him small lifts. This project could be interpreted on a superficial level – click and post – but actually, it introduces us to the daily need to create, or do something nice for ourselves.*

Elizabeth *There is always a sense of Evans being very present and engaged, whether loving or loathing his subjects. His work does not follow a particular narrative, nor is it stuck in a cul-de-sac of self-reflection. As with Cases, there is a pace and an excitement to his work. It's constantly taking us forward.*

Oliver *Certainly in this part of Evans' work the images are produced quickly, for immediate digestion and instant gratification rather than a slower, cerebral unfolding of personal experiences.*

Elizabeth *In contrast to the artists we spoke about at the beginning, the images of Cases and Evans are not made through a process of re-enactment, but rather one of enactment.*

Oliver *Activity, then, is what we're really talking about here. The artists we've discussed all enact and activate their memories in very physical ways through photography, from Evans' daily interactions, to Briggs' slicing of photographs and Watkins' layering of colour. Despite our first impressions, photography is not two-dimensional: it's experiential and it's alive.*



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Unattributed, circa 1904. Courtesy The Larry Dunstan Archive

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Video still, 'Simply Irresistible' by Robert Palmer. Courtesy Terence Donovan Archive.

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